(7) EFFECTS OF CHANGES OF LANGUAGE AT THE PRESENT TIME

Language is tlie most important mark of nationality and the chief means of creating and maintaining it. Apart from a small number of bilingual persons, everyone feels really at home in one language only. It is for him the medium for expressing his own thoughts and for the fullest comprehension of those of other people; it determines his sphere of intercourse and the literature he reads. It exercises a determining influence on the mentality of the child and the formation of its ideas; in a crystallized form the language hands on to it the mental work of many generations and is the starting-point of its own mental development. A language forms a common mental basis for all who speak it. Some strongly developed common interest is required for persons speaking different languages to understand each other in the same degree as do people speaking the same tongue even when the common interest is lacking. Without a common language there can be no lasting cultural community, and without cultural community there can be neither nations nor nationality.

The process of replacing Yiddish (and Spaniole) by the languages of the non-Jewish neighbours is therefore of extreme significance in the cultural

development of the Jews. The adoption of the vernacular is the first and most important stage in assimilation. It breaks the age-long continuity of the Jewish tradition, and replaces it by foreign learning and an alien tradition. Jewish civilization, one-sided but whole, disappears and there opens a wide field of inquiry beset with doubt. The simple philosophy of the Jew, based on unconditional faith in God, is shaken and, though the new knowledge may enrich his mind, it lacks the completeness and security of his former conceptions.

Change of language further causes children to be estranged